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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

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JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS

OPERATIONS RESEARCH PAPER

GALLIPOLI REVISTED

An Operational Assessment of the 1915 Dardanelles Campaign

By

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Seminar 9

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ABSTRACT

In 1915, the Allies conducted a series of operations -- known as the Gallipoli Campaign -- against the Turks in an attempt to force the Dardanelles Straits and threaten Constantinople. The campaign began with high hopes -- the potential rewards were inviting and the risks appeared to be minimal. Turkey was the weakest member of the Central Powers. Against her, the allies would direct an impressive array of naval and amphibious power. First, overwhelming naval power alone was applied. The Turks, however, were not overwhelmed. Then ground operations, supported by the navy, were employed. At Gallipoli the allies conducted the first major joint and combined amphibious operations of modern warfare. These efforts also failed. Following the failure, a debate arose regarding the campaign, which became one of the most studied military operations in history. But Gallipoli provides much more than an historical account of failure in battle. Gallipoli is a fascinating story of an attempt by the world's premier naval power in 1915, Great Britain, to use that power to influence world events. The campaign is a classic case study still used by students of amphibious warfare and joint operations. Lessons learned from the campaign -- distilled for nearly 80 years -- form the basis for much of today's U.S. Navy and Marine Corps doctrine. The focus of this paper is on the operational aspects of the campaign -- the leadership, planning, and coordination -- and on what might have been.

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CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

- Late SEP 1914 British turn back a Turkish torpedo boat attempting to exit the Dardanelles. In response a German officer, on his own authority, orders the straits closed and mined
- 03 NOV 1914 British Battle Cruiser Inflexible shells the outer defenses
- 01 JAN 1915 Russia's request for a demonstration against the Turks is received in London
- 05 JAN 1915 VADM Carden's response to Churchill's inquiry regarding feasibility of Dardanelles ops received by the Admiralty
- 13 JAN 1915 War Council approves Gallipoli campaign
- 19 FEB 1915 VADM Carden's Battle Group bombards the outer forts; minesweeping ops commence
- 08 MAR 1915 Turks lay new line of mines parallel to the straits(Linell)
- 12 MAR 1915 Kitchener announces plan to send a military force of 70,000 troops to Gallipoli
- 18 MAR 1915 VADM de Robeck commences new attack on the Straits; 3 Battleships sunk, 3 other ships damaged
- 20 MAR 1915 De Robeck telegraphs Admiralty with reattack plans
- 23 MAR 1915 After meeting with Hamilton, de Robeck agrees the army should play the main role with Navy in support
- 25 APR 1915 Allied forces land at Cape Helles and Gaba Tepe/Anzac
- 06 AUG 1915 Amphibious landings made at Suvla bay
- 19 DEC 1915 Anzac and Suvla evacuated
- 8,9 JAN 1916 Helles beach forces evacuated

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is an axiom among historians that a knowledge of history can serve as a guide to the present. This is not to say that the present ought simply to imitate the past, for every human situation is indeed unique, but rather that individuals and groups should act to meet new situations partly on the basis of past experience. Armed forces have a particularly bad reputation for not taking this axiom seriously.¹

The focus of this paper is on the operational level of warfare during the British-French Gallipoli Campaign of 1915 and will examine the leadership, planning, coordination and employment of forces by allied commanders during the campaign. The campaign has been described as both "the most brilliant and imaginative strategic conception of the war" and as a reckless adventure doomed to fail from the beginning.² Since 1915 the debate amongst historians and strategists has continued regarding Gallipoli. Did the mission fail because of flawed strategy or poor execution? Was the campaign doomed to fail from the outset (as some have argued) because of inadequate resources? If the operation had succeeded would it have made a decisive contribution to the war?

My personal opinion is that Gallipoli could have been a tremendous victory for the allies. Before reaching this conclusion I asked myself three questions. First, were the strategic objectives worthy of the effort? Second, were adequate resources available to accomplish the mission? And third,

¹ Arthur J. Marder, From the Dardanelles to Oran: Studies of the Royal Navy in War and Peace 1915-1940 (London: Oxford University, 1974) p.33.

² Bernadotte Schmitt and Harold Vedeler, The World In The Crucible 1914-1919. (New York: Harper and Row, 1984) p. 115.

did the concept of operations employed by the commanders afford them a reasonable chance of success? The answer to all three questions was emphatically "yes." The strategic rationale for the campaign provided tremendous incentives for undertaking the operation. This is particularly true in view of the alternatives being considered by Britain's War Council in early 1915 (i.e. deploying more troops to the Western Front in France, conducting amphibious operations in the North Sea/Baltic, and opening new campaigns in the Balkans or the Middle East). Adequate means were available to accomplish the mission. Further, although there are no "sure bets" in war, the plans employed during campaign had a reasonable chance of succeeding. (I will argue that there were at least four occasions when success was within the grasp of the allies.) It also appears that the campaign could have played a decisive role in bringing the war to an earlier end, with fewer losses suffered by the combatants.

Many of the accounts of the Allied efforts at Gallipoli make for interesting reading, but there are other worthwhile reasons for closely examining the details of the campaign.

The Gallipoli campaign is a classic case study for students of amphibious warfare. During the campaign four distinct types of amphibious operations were conducted -- demonstrations, raids, assaults and withdrawals.³ Many of the lessons learned at Gallipoli, both positive and

³ Cortez D. Stephens, "Gallipoli -- What Went Right?," Marine Corps Gazette, October 1993, pp. 73-77.

negative, remain valid. These lessons are particularly relevant to today's Navy-Marine Corps team in light of the renewed emphasis on littoral warfare -- for many of the challenges faced by the sailors and soldiers at Gallipoli in 1915 still confront modern day warriors operating from the sea.

Gallipoli also provides an excellent case study for military commanders, providing a contrast between some of the best and worst applications of operational art. Gallipoli is replete with poignant examples of why military planners and commanders should master the complexities of operational art and joint warfare. The essence of the Navy's White Paper, "...From the Sea," could have been written on the basis of the British experiences and lessons learned at Gallipoli.

First the Royal Navy was tasked with forcing the straits with ships alone. They nearly succeeded on two occasions. However, after suffering the loss of four capital ships, the naval commander grew tentative. How, he asked, could the navy be expected to "take Gallipoli with Constantinople as its objective"⁴ without the support of land forces? This was a reasonable question, and one that should have been resolved before the operation began. The navy, having decided that they could not succeed on their own, turned to the army.

The army accepted the task of securing the Gallipoli peninsula, but needed more time to prepare for the expedition. If the army had been included in the initial planning or been able to react more quickly, they

⁴ William Manchester, The Last Lion -- Visions of Glory 1874-1932 (New York: Laurel, 1983), p.521

would have faced a far weaker opposing force. The delay proved costly. The element of surprise that the British hoped to achieve was lost before the first troops went ashore. Though the Turks had been forewarned, the landings, which involved nearly 70,000 troops, were fairly successful. Once ashore, however, the operation "stalled." Rather than retreating in the face of a modern, well-equipped force (as the British expected), the Turks dug in and fought courageously. Intelligence at the tactical level was woefully inadequate -- for example, accurate maps were not available. Inter- and intra-service coordination was uneven -- army and navy commanders often assumed certain tasks would be performed by others when, in fact, no one had taken the required action. Basic logistics requirements -- like water -- became serious problems. Frustrated by the lack of progress, reinforcements were called for. A second major amphibious landing was made. The total number of troops committed to the campaign grew from the original 70,000 to nearly 500,000 men. If courage or commitment were the only critical elements needed, the operation would succeed. But, more was required. Despite the extraordinary efforts made by the sailors and soldiers, the campaign lacked the essential ingredients for success. *Whatever initiative the Allies gained through their efforts seemed to evaporate quickly.* Victory, seemingly within their grasp several times, eluded them. After eight months of failure and missed opportunities, the question was no longer when they would succeed but how were they going to extricate themselves from the stalemate. As casualties mounted (to

nearly a quarter million men) the decision was made to withdraw. Here, in the last phase of a humbling and frustrating experience, the allies put together *a joint operation that was meticulously planned, superbly coordinated and brilliantly executed*. Virtually *all* of the intangibles missing earlier in the campaign -- including boldness, deception, coordination, agility, synchronization, adaptability and luck -- were evident during the evacuation. It seems ironic that many of the same people who had failed to develop a cohesive plan for victory were so successful in "putting all the pieces together" for the withdrawal.

In the end, the operation was a *miserable failure*. Few of the strategic objectives of the campaign were achieved.⁵ Turkish pressure on the Russians in the Caucasus was relieved, but most of the campaign's potential rewards were not achieved. The costs of the campaign -- in terms of resources committed, casualties, and individual careers ruined -- were enormous. *The long term implications of the failure were far reaching*. The proponents of the campaign, who had sought an alternative strategy for fighting the war, were discredited. Those who had favored concentrating all available resources in France felt some how vindicated, and refocused their efforts for winning the war on the Western Front. "Even Churchill had now learned his lesson. The war was no longer to be won by strategic ploys or heroic adventures. Nothing would serve but skillfully applied attrition...."⁶

⁵ Schmitt and Vedeler, pp. 114-117

⁶ Robert Blake and W. Roger Louis, ed., *Churchill* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993) p. 140.

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGINS OF THE CAMPAIGN

In December 1914 -- after less than four months of fighting -- France and England had suffered nearly a million casualties in the war against Germany and the Central powers. Fighting on the Western Front had "bogged down" into a war of attrition, with neither side able to gain a decisive advantage over the other. In England, an editorial in *The Times* called for a strategy with a "touch of imagination."⁷ But where could the allies attack decisively? There were two schools of thought among members of Britain's War Council. The "Easterners" favored a traditional maritime-peripheral strategy that relied primarily on Britain's naval superiority. They proposed attacks on Borkum Island (off the German coast), Salonika, Syria, and the Dardanelles. The "Westerners" favored a continental strategy. Strongly supported by the army, they argued vehemently against the diversion of resources away from the main theater of war in France. The Westerners saw attrition as an inevitable aspect of modern warfare and believed that the addition of just a few more divisions, heavy guns, and trainloads of shells would lead to the long awaited breakthrough on the Western Front. The strategic debate was settled (at least temporarily) in early January 1915, when Grand Duke Nicholas of Russia requested "a demonstration of some kind against Turks...either naval

⁷ Manchester, p. 511.

or military," which was forwarded to London by Sir George Buchanan, British Ambassador in Petrograd.⁸ The Turks were pressing an attack against the Russians in the Caucasus. France and Britain could not afford to have Russia leave the war. Although poorly equipped and a poor match for the Germans, Russian armies were tying down German troops that could otherwise be fighting in France and Belgium. An attack against the Dardanelles was agreed upon. The immediate objective of the campaign was to demonstrate British and French commitment to the alliance.



The Turkish Theater --1915⁹

⁸ Jeffrey D. Wallin, *By Ships Alone: Churchill and the Dardanelles* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1981) pp. 51-52.

⁹ Manchester, p. 513.

The other potential rewards of a successful operation were enormous. Control of the straits would provide a link between Russia and her allies. Russia could get needed war supplies while Britain and France would have access to Russian wheat. Allied naval forces would pose a serious threat to Constantinople, Turkey's capital and only major industrial center. The threat to Constantinople might be enough to topple the badly divided Turkish government and drive Turkey out of the war. A victory would provide a tremendous boost to the sagging spirits of "the folks back home" and the government of Prime Minister H.H. Asquith. There was a strong possibility that the campaign might draw Greece, Bulgaria, Rumania and Montenegro -- all who had their own reasons for fighting Turkey and Austria-Hungary -- into the war on the side of the Entente. Access to the Black Sea would provide the Allies potential avenues to attack Germany's ally, Austria, via the Balkans. *Most importantly, opening a new front might be the catalyst needed to break the stalemate on the Western Front.*

Facing heavy pressure from the army, Lord Kitchener, the War Minister, pressed the Admiralty to attempt the attack unsupported by ground troops on Gallipoli.

CHAPTER III

THE NAVAL PHASE

First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, initially skeptical of Kitchener's proposal, consulted his senior Admirals. They were pessimistic about the prospects. Before turning Kitchener down, Churchill wired the commander of the blockading squadron off Cape Helles, Vice Admiral Sackville Carden, and asked for his opinion. Carden's response, received at the Admiralty on 5 January, was "electrifying."¹⁰ Not only did Carden indicate that the mission was feasible, he also forwarded his proposal on how the mission could be accomplished. Churchill and First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir John ("Jacky") Fisher, were now enthusiastic about the mission. The Navy would attempt to force the straits with ships alone.

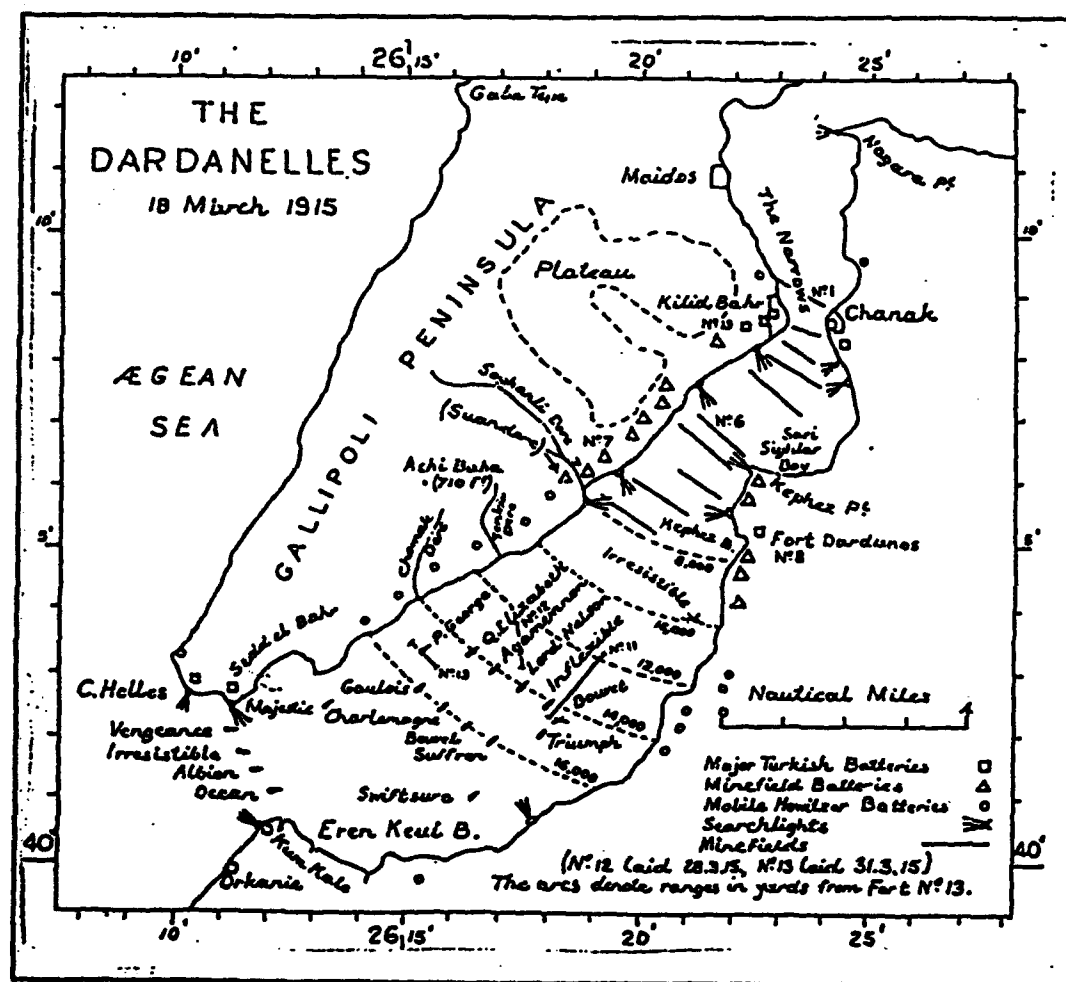
Turkish defense of the straits "consisted of four principle elements: forts, the minefields (and minefield and mobile howitzer batteries), torpedoes and floating mines."¹¹ Individually, none of these appeared to pose a significant challenge. Turkish guns were old and considered ineffective against moving targets. British minesweeping trawlers were capable of sweeping both fixed and floating mines. The Turks only had three fixed torpedo tubes at the Narrows that could be neutralized by gunfire. Most importantly, the Turks were extremely low on munitions of all types -- artillery shells, mines and torpedos. (This fact, thanks to good

¹⁰ Manchester, p. 519

¹¹ Marder, p. 2.

cryptographic work by British Intelligence, was known to the Naval Commanders.) Once their limited supply of munitions was exhausted, the Turks would be defenseless against the British fleet.

Carden's plan was to silence the forts and shore batteries with naval gunfire, then sweep the mines. But the plan was flawed. Carden had correctly assessed the threats posed by the Turks, but he had incorrectly assessed his capabilities to cope with them.



Dardanelles -- Disposition of De Robeck's Fleet, 18 March 1915

The initial bombardments on 25 February silenced the forts at the entrance of the straits. As the ships entered the straits, however, they encountered their first difficulties. The British Fleet, "which had concentrated before the war on gunnery and torpedo practices for a fleet action...had never practiced firing at shore targets."¹² His ships were having a difficult hitting their targets. Effective use of aerial spotting would have helped, but Carden did not understand the capabilities of the squadron of seaplanes available to him. As a result, the planes were frequently misemployed.¹³ Another option was to move closer to the targets. Getting closer to the batteries in the straits meant that the mines would have to be cleared first.

Carden's fleet of minesweeping trawlers, however, had several limitations. They were extremely slow, crewed by civilian fishermen, and carried a draught of 15-17 feet (placing them at risk in the minefields, where the mines had been placed at a depth of about 12 feet.) With an average speed of 5 knots and the current in the straits running between 2 to 4 knots, the trawlers resembled fixed targets when they sailed against the current. Seven attempts to sweep were made. Each attempt turned back. The first attempt, made in daylight, aborted shortly after it began when the Turks opened fire. Carden opted for night operations, believing that darkness would minimize the danger posed by the Turkish guns. Six

¹²Marder, p. 4.

¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 5-11.

attempts to sweep at night were made -- all were unsuccessful. The Turks effectively employed searchlights to illuminate the trawlers for their shore batteries. The trawler crews were terrified by the Turk's artillery. They were willing to die if a mine exploded but were unnerved by the prospects of sweeping under fire, even though Turkish gunners had demonstrated little capability for hitting them. There were other problems. Armor plating -- added to protect the cabins -- affected their compasses, making it almost impossible for the trawlers to navigate in the dark. Also, the accuracy of British gunners, which was a problem in daylight, was even less effective at night. Carden realized that he needed to change his plan again -- the next attempt would be in daylight.

Back in London, the War Council fretted over the lack of progress. On 12 March, Kitchener announced that he was sending 70,000 troops to Gallipoli. Carden wired his new plan to the Admiralty on 15 March. His warships would destroy the forts and dominate the shore batteries *while* the mines were being swept. The following day, Carden succumbed to a bad case of nerves and asked to be relieved. He was succeeded by his second in command, the highly regarded Vice Admiral Sir John de Robeck.

On March 18, Admiral de Robeck's fleet entered the straits. Unknown to him, the Turks had laid a new line of mines in an area that had been previously swept by the trawlers. "Line 11" was unique in that it was the only one aligned parallel to the straits, rather than perpendicular to it. The attacking warships steamed past these mines. The forts were being

systematically demolished...and victory seemed imminent.

It was a day out of season: pleasant, warm, with bright sunshine and a flawless overarching sky. De Robeck's attacking fleet, the mightiest ever seen in the Mediterranean, was spearheaded by four dreadnoughts, flanked by two battleships. A mile behind them came the four French men-of-war, also flanked by British battleships. Six more battleships, surrounded by destroyers and trawlers were held in reserve; they were to clear away the last obstacles, sail through the Narrows, and enter the Sea of Marmara the following morning. Twelve hours later the Union Jack and the French tricolor would fly over Constantinople.¹⁴

Disaster struck after the lead ships had completed their bombardment and turned southward, presumedly into safe waters. First the French battleship Bouvet, in a terrific explosion, sank in less than two minutes, taking over 600 men with her. Shortly thereafter Inflexible suffered an explosion in the vicinity of where the Bouvet went down.¹⁵ Then the battleship Irresistible was struck. De Robeck ordered a general withdrawal, during which a fourth battleship, the Ocean, sank. Because de Robeck believed that the area where the ships had gone down was clear of mines, he was uncertain as to the cause of the explosions. He suspected that the Turks had released floating mines into the straits. If he or anyone on his staff had plotted the positions where the ships were struck, they might have realized that the sinkings were in an area out of the current and that the positions fell in a straight line running from north to south. While his Chief of Staff, Commodore Roger Keyes, remained behind to direct rescue

¹⁴ Manchester, p. 538.

¹⁵ Inflexible, although badly damaged, did not sink. The ship did have to leave the scene to undertake extensive repairs.

operations, de Robeck called a meeting of his commanders onboard the Queen Elizabeth. At the meeting, de Robeck -- depressed by the loss of ships and certain that his career was finished -- seemed ready to abandon the mission. Keyes argued for continuing. The admiral reluctantly agreed and wired the Admiralty with his intentions. (In London, lost time, rather than the loss of ships, caused the greatest concern. Most of de Robeck's battleships were older ships destined to be scrapped, and were considered expendable. Shipments of arms and munitions from Germany were enroute to Turkey. The window of opportunity was closing.) The weather turned bad, leading de Robeck to delay the reattack. On 23 March, General Sir Ian Hamilton, commander of the newly formed Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, met with de Robeck. At the meeting, the two men agreed that a joint army-navy operation was more likely to succeed. De Robeck informed his staff and subordinate commanders that they would delay further operations until the army arrived. Land forces, supported by the Navy, would secure the Gallipoli peninsula and neutralize the Turkish artillery. *Then* the straits would be forced.

A silence now settled on the Gallipoli peninsula; no ship entered the straits, no gun was fired. The fleet lay at anchor in the islands. The first part of the great adventure was over.¹⁶

¹⁶ Alan Moorehead, Gallipoli (New York: Ballantine Books 1956) p. 79.

CHAPTER III

THE LANDINGS AND OPERATIONS ASHORE

While Churchill and Fisher fumed about the lack of aggressiveness by the Mediterranean Fleet, the first elements of Hamilton's force -- comprised of the 29th Infantry Division, two Australian-New Zealand (Anzac) divisions, the Royal Navy Division, and a French colonial division -- began deploying. At their head was Sir Ian Hamilton. Kitchener was confident that he had picked the right man for the job.

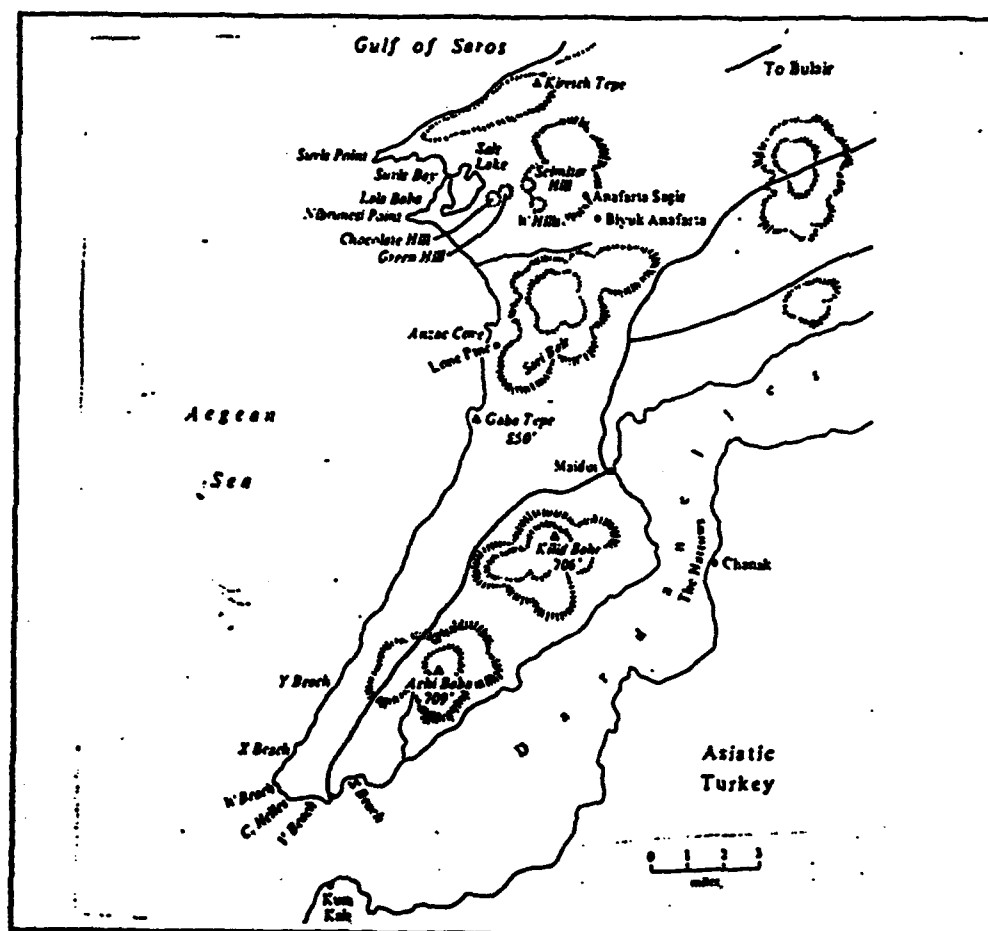
A brilliant commander who was also a first rate trainer of men and a good organizer, Hamilton seemed to combine all the qualities necessary to make the expedition a success....He had made his reputation in the first Boer War (1880) and on the Northwest Frontier of India and cemented it during the South African War (1899-1902)....During the years of peace that followed he revised British infantry tactics, breaking up rigid lines of advance into smaller flexible groupings; in his writings he stressed the overriding importance of attacking the enemy. In short Hamilton must have seemed like the ideal choice for the new venture.¹⁷

Hamilton's plan appeared to be very aggressive. The main body of his forces would land at five different beaches in the vicinity of Cape Helles (on the southern tip of the peninsula) simultaneously. A supporting attack would be made by the Anzacs in the vicinity of Gaba Tepe (In the following days, this beach would become known as Anzac Beach.) To cover the landings, Hamilton planned two amphibious demonstrations and an amphibious raid. French forces would make diversionary attacks on the

¹⁷ Cohen and Gooch, p. 138.

Asian side of the straits (a demonstration in the vicinity of Besika and a raid on the Turkish fort at Kum Kale). Meanwhile, the Royal Navy Division made an amphibious demonstration in the vicinity of Bulair. The diversions and initial stages of the landings by the main force were successful. Once ashore, however, the allies found themselves in an inhospitable setting.

The attack was based on two assumptions, both of which turned out to be unwise: that the only really difficult part of the operation would be getting ashore, after which the Turks could easily be pushed off the peninsula; and that the main obstacles to a happy landing would be provided by the enemy.¹⁸



The Gallipoli Peninsula and Beaches¹⁹

¹⁸ Cohen and Gooch, p. 137.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

The Turks had taken good advantage of the time since the initial shelling of the outer forts in November to build up their forces defending the straits. They also enjoyed fairly good intelligence on the British intentions and had done a credible job, under the direction of German General Liman von Sanders, in developing a defensive scheme to counter the anticipated British actions. Von Sanders commanded a force of 60,000 troops, but they were spread from Bulair to Helles and were on both sides of the straits.²⁰ Although outmanned in the vicinity of the landings, the Turks held the high ground and pinned down allied forces.

The allies encountered other problems, though, that proved as daunting as the Turkish defenses -- not the least of these was Gallipoli's unexpectedly harsh terrain. An Australian war correspondent, C.E.W. Bean, recorded his first impression of Gallipoli when he came ashore with the Anzacs on 25 April:

The place is like a sand-pit on a huge scale -- raw sand slopes and precipices alternating with steep slopes covered with low scrub -- the scrub where it exists is pretty dense.²¹

Hamilton's plan called for his forces to make coordinated attacks to seize the high ground that dominated the peninsula; then to join up and press northward to Bulair. While most of the groups encountered moderate-to-heavy resistance (especially the Anzacs) at least one beach offered an opportunity for a breakout. At "Y" beach, 2,000 troops landed

²⁰ Cohen and Gooch p. 137.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 152

unopposed and were in position to outflank a small Turkish force that had another landing group pinned down. Inexplicably, the troops did not attack or advance to the high ground. Instead, they held their position on the beach for the next 24 hours. Turkish reinforcements eventually arrived and drove this group back into the sea.

Hamilton's plan hinged on effective *communication and coordination between his forces ashore and the forces at sea*. Poor communications -- some caused by equipment problems; some caused by doctrinal and language difficulties -- and the lack of accurate maps hindered the operation. The army's reliance on Naval gunfire support was acute. Kitchener had withheld a large portion of the artillery requested by Hamilton, assuming that the fleet's firepower would more than offset the shortfall. Lacking reliable ship-to-shore communications and accurate maps, the army was unable to utilize the the fleet's firepower effectively. Also, as noted earlier, naval gunners were not very accurate initially. In time, the allies worked out procedures for communicating with the ships, accurate maps were obtained, spotting planes were employed to direct fires, and naval gunfire became increasingly accurate. Time, however, was not on the allies side. The Turks also continued to improve their defenses and sent additional forces to Gallipoli.

Another major problem was *coordination between the ground forces operating in five separate landing zones*. Although the lack of reliable comm gear and maps played a role, most coordination problems between

ground units appeared to be rooted in the personalities and military culture of the British commanders. Senior officers were very rank conscious and tradition bound. New ideas, adaptations of tactical plans and close coordination with others were viewed as somehow unsound. This might not have been critical to the operation's success if Hamilton had been given "front line" officers capable of operating independently. But most of Britain's "front line" officers were destined for France. Hamilton had been given a "mixed bag" of officers, who had little in common except their lack of combat experience. Several division and brigade commanders had been recalled from retirement and were called "dugouts."²² The "dugouts" -- well past their prime -- were not up to the physical and mental challenges that confronted them at Gallipoli. Hamilton was aware of the shortcomings of his senior officers and recognized many of the problems as they developed, but his concept of command made him reluctant to intervene.

"The view that the commander's role was to set the general objectives and then leave his subordinates and their staffs to work out the details was well established in the upper echelons of the British army."²³

This was a sound and reasonable approach, so long as his subordinates were capable. Unfortunately for Hamilton, they frequently were not.

The battle for Gallipoli began to resemble the Western Front -- trench warfare and stalemate. The promise of a quick, easy victory was lost in the

²² Cohen and Gooch, p.141.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

scrub covered rocky outcrops of Gallipoli. "In the first month, Hamilton lost forty-five thousand men....It was over-the-top carnage, with no gains of consequence."²⁴ Hamilton's troops clung to three separate toeholds on the peninsula. For three months the Turk's stymied their efforts to breakout or join up. To break the deadlock Hamilton planned for a new amphibious landing at Suvla Bay. The landing would be commanded by Lieutenant General Sir Frederick Stopford. Hamilton had sought a general with recent combat experience to lead the operation. Kitchener balked and instead offered Hamilton a choice between two "dugouts." The fate of the operation rested on the shoulders of an officer described thusly:

He was deprecating, courteous, fatherly, anything except the commander of an Army Corps which had been entrusted with a major operation that might change the whole course of the war in twenty four hours.²⁵

Before the landings, Stopford began conjuring up a host of reasons why the operation would fail. He complained to Hamilton that he lacked enough howitzers and argued that, without more guns, his troops could not be expected to attack a strongly entrenched foe. In fact, aerial photos showed that the Turk's had few troops in the vicinity of Suvla. This information, however, was unknown to Stopford.

Despite Stopford's pessimism, the landings began on the morning of 7 August on a good note. The Turks had been caught by surprise.

²⁴ Manchester, p. 551.

²⁵ Cohen and Gooch, p. 141.

During the first day Stopford put 20,000 men ashore. His force enjoyed a massive ten-to-one superiority, for it faced...no more than 2,000 Turks...backed by 11 guns.²⁶

As his troops piled ashore, Stopford remained onboard the Jonquil, with his staff onboard another ship. Hamilton, meanwhile, was on the island of Lemnos, about an hour away for most of the battle. Ashore, Stopford's brigadiers began arguing about everything but how to exploit the opportunity confronting them. For two days, faced with minimal opposition, the troops did little more than set up camp on the beach. Hamilton, disturbed by the lack of progress reports, sent a member of his staff, Colonel Aspinall, to see what was going on. Aspinall's telegram confirmed Hamilton's fears, "Feel confident that golden opportunities are being lost and look upon the situation as serious."²⁷ Hamilton arrived at Suvla late on 8 August, and attempted to reinvigorate the offense. Not until the next day, however, were Stopford's forces able to muster an advance toward the high ground. The delay enabled Turkish troops, under the capable leadership of Mustafa Kemal, to arrive and seize the high ground overlooking Suvla just before Stopford's troops began their belated assault. The attack was driven back. Another window of opportunity was missed, and once again the British paid dearly for their lack of aggressiveness. Stopford, finally ready to fight, hurled his troops in a succession of unsuccessful attacks against the Turk's through the remainder of August, with little more than casualties to

²⁶ Cohen and Gooch pp. 143-144.

²⁷ Ibid., pp.144-145.

show for the effort.

In early September Hamilton requested 95,000 additional troops. Kitchener denied the request. By October there was growing sentiment in the British press and parliament for evacuating Gallipoli. (Churchill, the strongest proponent of the campaign, had been pressured into resigning from the Admiralty in May.) The Dardanelles Committee was convened to determine why the campaign had faltered. The first recommendation made by the committee was that Hamilton be relieved. On 15 October, General Sir Charles Munro replaced Hamilton. Munro arrived in theater on 28 October. After two days of meetings with his staff, he decided that it was indeed time to begin planning an evacuation. At a meeting on 1 November, Munro and de Robeck agreed to establish a joint army-navy committee to develop an evacuation plan.²⁸ Munro predicted that the evacuation would be costly -- estimating casualties of 40 percent (more than 40,000 men.) Kitchener, unwilling to accept defeat or Munro's projected losses, personally visited Gallipoli on 15 November. Only after he saw the situation firsthand and conferred personally with Munro did Kitchener agree to an evacuation.

²⁸ Keith Lawless, "The Evacuation Phase of the Gallipoli Campaign of 1915," Unpublished Research Paper, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, FT Leavenworth, KS: 1993

CHAPTER IV

THE EVACUATION

In November de Robeck fell ill and was replaced by his nominal superior, Admiral Sir Rosslyn Wester Wemyss. Wemyss, supported by the Admiralty, opposed the evacuation and argued to continue the operation. In a concession to the Navy, Kitchener authorized an evacuation at Suvla and Anzac, but ordered Munro to maintain the foothold at Helles.

In early December, over 130,000 allied troops occupied positions on Gallipoli, along with 15,000 animals and 400 field guns.²⁹ The evacuation plan, discreetly begun in late October, had been meticulously developed by the 3-man joint committee. One key to the plan's success was the ability of the Allies to deceive the Turks. While maintaining the appearance of business-as-usual during the day, the forces at Anzac and Suvla were to be methodically reduced at night. Frontline troops, many in visual contact with the Turks, were to be withdrawn last. The joint committee was remarkably thorough -- logistics requirements, the impact of deteriorating weather, potential threats posed by the Turks, etc. had been evaluated. They had developed innovative "work arounds" for a wide range of contingencies. As an example, the Navy was short of vessels needed to meet the evacuation's proposed timetable. To compensate for the shortage, the committee proposed using a combination of motor lighters and pull boats for pierside and beach embarkation of troops. The pull boats were connected to ships

²⁹ Lawless, p. 22.

offshore by ropes, effecting a pulley system whereby the boats could be loaded, then quickly pulled out to the awaiting vessel. To maintain operational security a number of steps were taken. The islands of Lemnos and Imbros, intermediate sites for offloading evacuees, were cordoned off by the Navy. Fishermen and traders were restricted from the islands under the pretense of a smallpox epidemic. Few officers or men knew about the decision to evacuate until the plan was actually implemented. When the evacuation began an elaborate deception plan was employed. At night, thousands of cooking fires were kept burning, as had been done routinely during the preceding months. Men scheduled for evacuation wrapped their feet in burlap and blankets covered the piers to muffle the sounds of the embarkation. During the day, allied vessels unloaded men and supplies, adding to the illusion of a continued buildup on the peninsula. Turkish defenders were unaware that the same men were cast in this role each night and that the boxes and crates being unloaded were empty.³⁰

A serious security risk to the operation arose in England. Parliament was openly debating the merits of a withdrawal and daily editorials on the topic had shown up in British and French newspapers. Luckily for the allies, the Turks discounted this dialogue as propaganda designed to mask preparations for a new allied offensive at Gallipoli.³¹ Coordination between the army and the navy, which had been outstanding during the planning

³⁰ Moorehead, pp. 342-343

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

phase, was even better during the evacuation. Between 13 and 20 December more than 83,000 troops were successfully withdrawn from Suvla and Anzac without incident. On 20 December, among the last men to leave Anzac cove were 200 veterans of the 25 April landing, who had volunteered to stay until the very last.³²

Munro telegraphed Kitchener of the successful evacuation and requested approval for immediate evacuation of Helles. Meanwhile, von Sanders, who was not amused by the allies successful withdrawal, ordered preparations for a massive attack on the remaining Allied foothold. The 40,000 Allied troops at Helles, under the command of Lieutenant General Sir Francis Davies, faced a Turkish force of 120,000 men.

It was an impossible position for the British. They had four divisions in Cape Helles. If they stayed they knew it could not be for long before the Turks mounted a major attack...if they attempted to go they were hardly likely to outwit the Turks a second time.³³

The plan for the Helles evacuation mirrored the one used at Anzac and Suvla, with the last troops to be evacuated by 9 January. Though there were serious challenges confronting Davies, the situation at Helles was better in some respects than it had been at Suvla or Anzac. The beaches were better protected from the elements and the trench system was more developed. Engineers and navy crews supporting the evacuation had developed a few new innovations. A network of jetties, floating bridges,

³² Lawless, p.41.

³³ Moorehead, p. 325.

interconnected piers, and causeways had been prepared to enhance the speed and security of the operation. The engineering efforts enabled de Robeck (who had recovered from his illness and returned to replace Wemyss) to implement a plan to use six destroyers as troop carriers, with each ship accomodating a thousand men. The motor lighters carried a maximum of 400 troops. Everything was proceeding smoothly until 7 January, when the Turks commenced 5 hours of heavy artillery bombardments then launched an attack on the Allied positions. British forces used a combination of withering enfillade fire and naval gunfire to break the Turkish assault. The strong British response convinced von Sanders that the withdrawal at Helles had not commenced, facilitating the successful evacuation of the remaining 17,000 troops. The last allied troops left Gallipoli in the early morning hours of 9 January.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The Gallipoli campaign presented a series of opportunities to the Allies that were missed or squandered. There were mistakes at every level -- strategic, operational and tactical -- that contributed to the failure. At the strategic level, British leaders failed to articulate clearly what, and how important, their strategic objectives were. The War Council and the senior staffs in London were seeking a quick, "cheap" victory, expecting ambitious gains with the minimal commitment of resources. In their haste, they *assumed away many of the risks* inherent in the operation, and placed the burden for planning the campaign on their operational commanders with little or no strategic guidance. As a result, forces and supporting resources were committed in piecemeal fashion throughout the campaign. At the tactical level, *inexperience and lack of initiative* often led the men who were doing the fighting to stop when confronted by even relatively minor problems. Many of these problems should have been anticipated and resolved *before the operations commenced*.

But I began this paper stating that the focus would be on the operational level of war. Why did three successive operational commanders -- Carden, de Robeck and Hamilton -- fail? They were intelligent, dedicated professional officers with distinguished military records. Yet somehow, they were inadequate for the task. The issue centers on two concepts: *the ability of the commander to translate the strategic objectives into a concept*

of operations to attain those objectives; and *his ability to adapt the plan* to the dynamic environment that confronts him in battle. If his concept is sound and updated to the "real world," he has a reasonable chance of success. Implicit in this is that the commander believes that he has the resources required to undertake the mission and that he effectively employs those resources to attack the enemy's weaknesses.

Every commander...must produce a concept each time he receives a mission...and every time his working concept is nullified by changing circumstance....This is a process we blithely label as "seizing the initiative." He who has the initiative must surely have seized it via the imposition of his own concept, and he who loses the initiative has seen his concept rendered useless by the actions of the opposing commander....Poor execution can render the most brilliant concept null and void, but the most magnificent execution can rarely offset the deadweight of a flawed concept.³⁴

The operational commander, more than anyone else, bears the responsibility for *both planning and execution*. The Navy almost succeeded in forcing the straits on two occasions. Admiral Carden's original plan was flawed, but not fatally so. Pressured to commence the operations as soon as possible, neither he nor his staff had worked through all the details for the mission when they commenced the assault on 25 February. However, all the tools were available. There were four adjustments that Cardin was in the process of implementing that would have improved his chances for success: more effective use of the seaplanes for spotting; crewing the trawlers with naval personnel rather than civilians (Keyes began doing this

³⁴ William DePuy, "Concepts of Operation: the Heart of Command, the Tool of Doctrine," *Army Magazine*, August 1988, p. 28.

after the first two attempts failed); switching to daylight minesweeping (the Turk's effective use of searchlights had negated any benefit of night ops); and concentrating the fires against the minefield batteries rather than attempting to neutralize *all* of the Turkish guns. The Turkish batteries, in general, lacked the accuracy or the range to pose a threat to Carden's fleet. Though annoying, the minefield batteries only posed a threat to the trawlers when they were operating close to the shore. It was *the minefields, not the guns, that posed the only serious threat* to Cardin's fleet and prevented him from advancing to Constantinople. If he had concentrated on defeating the mines, the Turks would have exhausted their limited supply of shells in vain, and Carden may very well have succeeded.

Carden was an able strategist. His plan to rush the Dardanelles was sound. But he was a worrier....Carden's weakness was that, faced with an operation requiring exceptional daring, he was unsure of himself. It was a disease among military leaders in that war and it was catching. Confronted by so many martial innovations, most senior officers by 1915 had become excessively cautious and easily discouraged. Bravery had nothing to do with it. Carden's second in command, Vice Admiral John de Robeck, was brave in battle, but faced with crucial decisions, he would prove to be of the same stripe.³⁵

De Robeck "inherited" the mission on short notice when Carden suffered his "breakdown" on 15 March, two days before the fleet was to make its next attempt at forcing the straits. De Robeck came so close to victory on 18 March that Churchill and Fisher could "taste it" in London. His consternation about losing a third of his battleships was understandable.

³⁵ Manchester p.533.

His failure to analyze accurately the cause of the losses, his unwillingness to accept additional losses, and his loss of confidence doomed the Navy's efforts to force the straits by ships alone. No amount of encouragement by Churchill or Fisher -- including the deployment of ships to replace those lost on the 18th -- could convince de Robeck that he could succeed without the support of the army. Ironically, both the Turks and the Germans believed that de Robeck would renew the attack the next day, and that they were defenseless to stop him. General von Sanders said afterward that if de Robeck had attacked on March 19 he would have found Constantinople undefended and that Turkey would have surrendered. This belief was echoed by Turkey's wartime dictator, Enver Pasha.³⁶

Now it was Hamilton's "turn in the barrel." Of all the problems confronting Hamilton, none was more daunting than the dilemma he faced regarding leadership. He was a capable leader who believed strongly in delegating authority to his subordinates. But, Hamilton had two glaring weaknesses in his officer corps. Division and brigade level leadership was at best mixed, with several critical positions held by "dugouts." He was also extremely short of capable junior officers. His troops were willing to fight, but inexperienced. They needed leaders capable of identifying what the objectives were and driving towards them. A recurring problem that Hamilton never solved was the inertia that seemed to set in every time his troops were in position to commence offensive operations. This could only

³⁶ Manchester p.542.

have been overcome by bold, effective leadership. Hamilton needed to "lay some heavy leadership on," or replace, his weaker generals. He was unwilling or unable to do either. By failing to intervene, Hamilton allowed a mixture of incompetence, arrogance, pessimism, and politicizing to persist at the senior officer level throughout the campaign.

Another problem confronting Hamilton was the tactical employment of his troops. Many officers of his day failed to grasp the significance of experiences gained during the U.S. Civil War and the Russo-Japanese War³⁷ (i.e., the advantages afforded the defense as a result of modern weaponry, including the machine gun, and the terrible implications of linear warfare against entrenched forces). Uncomfortable or unfamiliar with the concept of "maneuver warfare," most of his officers adopted the "over-the-top, eat-steel" tactics so popular on the Western Front. But Hamilton had written extensively on maneuver warfare, and had developed innovative tactics for the infantry that emphasized "initiative," "surprise," "synchronization" and "speed." Though he understood conceptually why these elements were critical to the success of an operation, he failed to insist that they be employed in *this* operation. Hamilton left the tactics and operational tempo of the campaign to his subordinates. For eight months, his forces endured hardships comparable to those on the Western Front. But the differences between the two theaters were enormous. His forces were not fighting the

³⁷ Hamilton witnessed the Russo-Japanese War firsthand as a military observer in the Far East, and he wrote a major study of the war.

Germans; nor were the boundaries of the battlefield as defined or constraining; nor were the enemy's defenses nearly as developed as they were on the Western Front. It is difficult to fathom how he reconciled the persistent failures by some of his subordinates without intervening. During the initial landings in April and again at Suvla Bay in August, Hamilton had the initiative. He had found weaknesses in the Turkish defenses. Yet he remained passive while the initiative passed to the Turks. He had ample opportunities to shape, or reshape, the battle. Backed up by the Navy and enjoying virtual control of the sea, he had the freedom to maneuver his troops by sea -- when and where he wanted. He also had the ability to "see and shoot" over the horizon (i.e., aerial recon/targeting and indirect fire) thanks to the aircraft and the warships at his disposal. He never fully exploited these advantages to attack the Turkish defenses in depth or to disrupt their resupply.

The brilliant and (surprisingly) successful evacuations strongly suggest that the allies possessed the requisite ingredients for success all along, but failed to employ them.

And so Gallipoli went into the history books as a "loss" for the allies. The war would continue for another three, carnage-filled years. Would a victory at Gallipoli have made a decisive difference? We will never know. But the potential -- really awesome potential -- for an allied victory and a radically different outcome for the war was there. If only....

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